

# Gov. Markell, Sen. Carper join DNREC in celebrating opening of Artillery Park at the Fort Miles Museum

*Ceremony highlights 'Mighty Mo's' 16-inch gun, along with other historic artillery, and commemorates the 71st anniversary of the end of World War II*



Local dignitaries and veterans join Senator Carper and Governor Markell (center of photo with hands on ribbon) for the opening of the Fort Miles Artillery Park at Cape Henlopen State Park, with a commemorative event marking the 71st anniversary of the end of WWII. /DNREC photo: Jennifer Fitzsimmons

**CAPE HENLOPEN STATE PARK** – Among scenic dunes overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, the Fort Miles Museum's newest exhibit, the World War II Artillery Park, was officially opened with DNREC and the Fort Miles Historical Association hosting Governor

Jack Markell, US Senator Tom Carper, local dignitaries and military veterans including honored guest Robert Sauppee, who was reunited with his personal history Friday morning in Cape Henlopen State Park. The ribbon-cutting ceremony was held beneath the centerpiece of the Artillery Park – one of “Mighty Mo’s” original 16-inch guns, a giant artillery piece mounted on the battleship U.S.S. Missouri (the “Mighty Mo”) when the Japanese surrendered 71 years ago today, on Sept. 2, 1945, ending WWII. Mr. Sauppee, who traveled to the commemorative ceremony from his home in Reading, Pa., was also aboard the “Mighty Mo” that day as a young US serviceman.

“The Fort Miles Artillery Park preserves an important part of Delaware’s wartime history and honors the courage and heroism of the men and women who defended our country during World War II,” said Gov. Jack Markell. “The historic treasures and new amenities here will attract families and visitors to the beautiful shores of Cape Henlopen State Park and boost the local economy. The Fort Miles Museum’s unique features exemplify why Delaware State Parks was recognized nationally this year with the Gold Award as the best-managed park system in the nation.”

Today’s event took place at Fort Miles, which during WWII served as the East Coast’s largest combat-ready post and a key piece in the nation’s coastal defense. In 1964, 543 acres of the Fort were returned to the State of Delaware, forming the heart of Cape Henlopen State Park. In April 2005 Fort Miles was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

“Delaware has a long history of protecting our nation, and Fort Miles is a big part of that history,” said U.S. Senator Tom Carper, a 23-year veteran of the U.S. Navy. “‘Mighty Mo’s’ gun was saved from becoming scrap metal after a like-minded group came together including folks from the Fort Miles Historical Association, DNREC and my office, to bring it to Delaware. Attractions like this allow the First State’s rich military history to live on, honoring the more than 73,000

veterans living in Delaware today.”

“The Fort Miles Artillery Park, with ‘Mighty Mo’s’ gun and other WWII artillery, is representative of the armaments that were stationed here for coastal defense,” said DNREC Secretary David Small. “We are incredibly appreciative of the Fort Miles Historical Association members, whose spirit and dedication are reminiscent of this country’s ‘Greatest Generation’ who built and manned Fort Miles and protected the region during WWII. Now, veterans, families, students, visitors and history buffs can relive an important part of Delaware history surrounded by the buildings and artifacts that will help make the experience come alive.”

Among the largest pieces of U.S. Naval artillery ever made, “Mighty Mo’s” 16-inch gun weighs more than 116 tons and is 66 feet long. The huge 16-inch barrel could hurl 2,700 pound shells more than 23 miles in 50 seconds, with pinpoint accuracy, in support of U.S. ground troops. Two similar guns were housed at Fort Miles’ Battery Smith during WWII, but later relocated elsewhere.

“The Fort Miles Historical Association is proud and honored to partner with Delaware State Parks on the completion of the World War II Artillery Park,” said FMHA President Gary Wray. “With ‘Mighty Mo’s’ gun as the centerpiece, the Artillery Park is the largest exhibit of its kind in the country. The Fort Miles Museum, when completed, will be the best World War II museum inside a World War II facility in the U.S.”

“With more than a million visitors a year, Cape Henlopen State Park is beloved by Delawareans and tourists from throughout the country,” said DNREC Parks & Recreation Director Ray Bivens. “The Fort Miles Artillery Park is a wonderful attraction that tells the story of the U.S. Army Coast Artillery Corps that played a vital role in protecting the region’s coastline during WWII. DNREC appreciates the tremendous efforts of the Fort Miles Historical Association

and the thousands of volunteer hours that members have contributed to the Fort Miles Museum.”

“Mighty Mo’s” gun was scheduled to be cut up and sold for scrap if a suitable home for it could not be found. Through a joint plan written by the Fort Miles Historical Association (FMHA) and DNREC, the gun was donated to DNREC’s Division of Parks & Recreation by the U.S. Naval Systems Command. FMHA’s U.S.S. Missouri Gun Fundraising Committee raised \$113,000 through private donations and several key grants from the GM Foundation, Sussex County Council and the Delaware Tourism office, to move the gun by barge and rail from the naval yard in Norfolk to the Artillery Park.

“The U.S.S. Missouri’s big gun symbolizes our local military history and is a fitting centerpiece for the Fort Miles Artillery Park,” said Nick Carter, chair of the U.S.S. Missouri Gun Fundraising Committee and a U.S. Navy veteran who served two tours in Vietnam. “Because of my family’s World War II military service here in Lewes, I was asked to chair the fundraising committee that brought ‘Mighty Mo’s’ gun to Delaware. My sincere appreciation to the organizations and individuals who donated funding and to my wife, Laurie, who coordinated the logistics of moving the gun to Fort Miles.”

The opening of the Artillery Park marks the end of a four-year effort to place “Mighty Mo’s” gun and other armaments at the foot of Battery 519. FMHA raised a total of more than \$430,000 for the project, including the funding to transport “Mighty Mo’s” gun to Delaware, grants received from the Longwood Foundation, Community Foundation and Crystal Trust, and contributions from state legislators and almost 100 individuals. State funding for the Artillery Park came from 2013-2015 Bond Bill appropriations provided by the state legislature.

Lockwood Brothers, subcontractor for the Artillery Park contractor Kent Construction Co., moved “Mighty Mo’s” gun

barrel to Delaware and mounted it on an emplacement that includes a 90,000-pound concrete base, 70,000-pound slide, and 38,500-pound yoke and other parts. The total weight of the permanent display is more than 300 tons. Bell Terra Landscaping and Lighting installed lighting around the display.

In addition to the artillery, the site features new restrooms and showers for visitors and for future overnight guests, a central pathway, a renovated mess hall and wayside signs that tell the story behind each gun. Another addition includes a new geothermal HVAC system, made possible by two Delaware Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants – one to the city of Lewes and the other grant to Delaware State Parks.

“The opening of the Fort Miles Artillery Park provides further definition of the important role that Cape Henlopen played in the defense of the mid-Atlantic coast during World War II,” said Lewes Mayor Ted Becker. “In conjunction with the numerous other historical attractions in the area, this Artillery Park ensures that future generations are aware of how our region has been key to the defense of this country from colonial times to the present. The Fort Miles Historical Association is to be commended for their extraordinary efforts to bring this to reality.”

“The news of the Mighty Mo’s gun is a fantastic addition to the already wonderful historical attractions at Fort Miles in Cape Henlopen State Park,” said Senator Chris Coons. “The impressive size of the gun gives visitors a unique perspective to how large these ships were, and adds another component that will attract visitors to this wonderful state park. I look forward to visiting the latest installment, the World War II Artillery Park, at the Fort Miles Museum.”

“Fort Miles is a special part of our state’s history, and a reminder of the important role Delaware played in defending our nation during WWII,” said Congressman John Carney. “The

Fort Miles Historical Association has done an excellent job of preserving this important piece of our past, and the new Fort Miles Artillery Park is a wonderful tribute to those who bravely served our nation. It will also allow visitors to have a unique, firsthand look at some of the artifacts from the era, like 'Mighty Mo's' gun. I am grateful to all those who helped make this exciting new exhibit possible."

FMHA continues to provide strong volunteer support to the Fort Miles Museum—by guiding tours, completing complex hands-on restoration projects, helping with special events, and providing marketing support for Fort Miles. The Association completed the first room of the Museum's Art Gallery earlier this year, which features the works of noted local artists Howard Schroeder, Mary Marshall and Abraxas Hudson. Guided tours of the gallery are set to start in the fall. A new exhibit "Midway to Munich," featuring the art of noted aviation artist Paul Rendel, opens Oct. 8. That event will showcase, and make available for sale, some of Rendel's most famous works, and marks the unveiling of a new piece commemorating "Mighty Mo's" gun placement at the Fort Miles Museum. Proceeds of the event will go to support the Fort Miles Museum.

With the artillery park now complete, FMHA will focus on completing interior exhibits, outdoor programming venues and parking for the Museum. New exhibits will showcase ordinary life in WWII-era Delaware, and the important roles that ordinary citizens played in our nation's defense through the Civil Air Patrol, Delaware River and Bay Pilots Association and other local organizations and causes. A fall kickoff event is planned to launch a \$2.1 million capital campaign.

For more information on Cape Henlopen State Park and Fort Miles Historical Area, visit DNREC's website, [www.destateparks.com](http://www.destateparks.com).

The Fort Miles Historical Association is a nonprofit group

whose mission is to preserve, protect and defend all aspects of Fort Miles working with community and state stakeholders and other interested parties. The association's goal is to work as an active partner with the State of Delaware to develop the historical potential of Fort Miles.

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